

**AMENDMENTS TO THE SPECIFICATION**

Please replace paragraph [0022] with the following paragraph:

[0022] In accordance with another exemplary embodiment of the present invention, protective layer 24 may comprise copper. Copper protective layer 24 may be formed by CVD, ALD, PVD (including, but not limited to, planar-magnetron PVD and ionized PVD), or any other suitable deposition method. Preferably, copper protective layer 24 is deposited to a thickness sufficient to protect barrier layer 16 from oxidation or contamination due to exposure to ambient conditions but is not grown beyond that thickness. Growth beyond this thickness (such as that necessary to form a copper seed layer) is not necessary as barrier layer [[14]] 16 is formed of a material that permits or facilitates the nucleation of copper thereon. Preferably, copper protective layer 24 is grown to a thickness no greater than about 20 angstroms. More preferably, copper protective layer 24 is grown to a thickness no greater than about 10 angstroms. In addition, it is not necessary to remove copper protective layer 24 prior to the electrochemical deposition of copper.